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ABSTRACT

The article examines ways to differentiate the material used in a reading program for gifted students (birth to age 9). Suggested books are provided for the following categories that correspond to recognized characteristics of gifted children: vocabulary (quality retellings of folk tales, word play, poetry, satire, and nuances of language); curiosity (wordless books, imaginative play, informational books on single topics); sensitivity (friendship, peer relationships, relationships with adults); appreciation of beauty (quality illustrations); and humor (absurd situations, sense of fun, and word play). It is concluded that children's literature can become an important part of the reading program and that books can be representative of the strengths of gifted children. (CL)

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LITERATURE FOR USE WITH GIFTED CHILDREN

Gifted children have been the focus of observation and research for more than sixty years. One result has been the establishment of agreed upon characteristics that describe this population. It is important to remember, however, that these characteristics are drawn from observation and research on many gifted children and that no one child should be expected to exhibit all of the characteristics attributed to the gifted. Those characteristics that most easily lend themselves to exploration through children's literature are the early and accurate use of a large vocabulary, intense curiosity, a heightened sensitivity to self and others, an appreciation of beauty, and a sense of humor (Baker & Bender, 1981).

"The reading needs of the gifted and creative differ in many respects from those of other groups" (Labuda, 1974, p. 6). They differ because of gifted children's intellectual capacity (which allows them to learn greater quantities at a more rapid pace), their appetite for learning, their breadth and depth of knowledge, and their tendency for creative thinking and production. Barbe and Renzulli (1971, p. 19) state that "planned differentiation of reading instruction is necessary if the gifted and creative are to receive the type of education they both need and deserve." Trezise (1978, p. 743) agrees with this statement and expands on it

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by saying that the planned differentiation must be "in regard to timing and pacing, depth and degree, teaching style and materials, and student response."

The focus of this article will be on differentiating the materials used in a reading program for the gifted. Because of their rapidly expanding intellects and wide reading interests, gifted children must be provided with an "abundance of reading material" (Nelson & Cleland, 1981, p. 420) and a diversity of reading matter (Laurence, 1980). The best way to appropriately differentiate the materials used in the reading curriculum for the gifted is to use good children's and young adult literature as the basis for the program.

Children's books can be a valued part of the development of gifted children's abilities. These books can provide a stimulus to thinking and exploring the world and can enhance language capabilities. While we recognize, and in fact, encourage the use of good literature for all children, we believe that gifted children's reading programs must be grounded in it.

This article presents books that are suggested for use with gifted children of the ages from birth to nine years old. Children should be read to from birth, and though gifted children often learn to read early, the shared joy of reading aloud should continue throughout childhood. The

categories used are those that respond to the recognized characteristics of the gifted that were mentioned above.

VOCABULARY

One of the most striking characteristics of gifted children is the early and accurate use of a large and varied vocabulary (Witty, 1958). These children love to play with words and the more they are exposed to words in a rich context, the more they absorb and make use of their extended vocabulary in everyday communication.

The young toddler can enjoy the adventures of Max, a rabbit who is sure to bring giggles as well as to familiarize the listener with the major concept words such as UP, OVER, UNDER, THROUGH, and the like, in the book Max's Ride by Rosemary Wells. They can also empathize with Max as his sister tries to get him to say his first word. When Ruby keeps saying "Yum, Yum", Max finally silences her with Max's First Word--"Delicious!" Undoubtably a gifted young rabbit!

The classic tales of childhood should be shared early and often. There are so many versions to choose from that it would be wise to skim several before selecting one to be purchased. If one were going to borrow the books from the library, it would be fun to choose several versions of the same tale, discuss the differences and find the one that was most satisfying to the individual reader/listener.

Complexity and beauty of language as well as illustration can be found in the retellings of Little Red Riding Hood by Trina Schart Hyman, Babushka by Charles Mikolaycak, and Hansel and Gretel by Rika Lesser and Paul O. Zelinsky. Although there is a plethora of mediocre and poor retellings of folk literature, these three books are representative of the quality that can be found. It is worth the time to search for the best when we consider the long term effects on the development of language in the young child.

Word play is central in many books for the young and Arnold Lobel's The Book of Pigericks is an excellent example of the pleasure that can come when one creates limericks about a favorite animal. The exuberance of the pigericks could lead the reader/listener into joining in with the existing rhyme and then composing personal limericks. Eloise Greenfield makes use of word play to create sounds and images in Honey, I Love. These poems invite the listener to join in the recitation and to explore the possibilities of sound as a component of language.

Some authors use words imaginatively when fashioning the world around them. The descriptive language in Kathryn Lasky's Sugaring Time allows us to feel the bite of the cold, enjoy the "earthy smell of spring up in the meadow," and experience a sugar-on-snow party where the cold sweet taste of the new maple syrup is "much better than jelly beans or even chocolate Easter eggs." Byrd Baylor makes The

Best Town in the World appear before our eyes with the magic of her words. Olaf Baker captures the sights and sounds of the prairie in Where the Buffaloes Begin and propels us from the immense stillness in which Little Wolf lies mesmerized by the mysterious murmur of the buffalo to the bellowing, stamping, surging flood of buffalo in a stampede. The aura is overpowering and the imagery of the words is augmented by the stunning illustrations of Stephen Gammell. Books that employ language in an interesting way aid gifted children in comprehending the qualitative use of language and make obvious the difference between that which is well-written and that which is cliche-ridden.

Gifted children enjoy the subtle nuances of language and can appreciate the gentle satire in books such as Steig's The Amazing Bone and Heide's Treehorn's Wish. Their knowledge as well as their sensitivity to the feelings of others will allow gifted children to respond to these books at a depth impossible for others.

CURIOSITY

Gifted children sometimes seem to have an insatiable curiosity (Krueger, 1978) and one way of providing an answer to their seemingly endless questions is to present an abundance of books on a variety of topics. This is also a wonderful way to stimulate their curiosity and to provoke more questions. Beginning with wordless books for the

youngest child, questions can be asked such as Is It Rough? Is It Smooth? Is It Shiny? (Hoban), and the young reader can seek the hidden characters in an "I Spy" story such as Each Peach Pear Plum (Ahlberg & Ahlberg). The interaction of the reader with the story and with the caregiver who is presenting the story provides a foundation for the future encounters with story structure and for the development of the framework for language discussions about books that children will experience in school.

The imaginative play of gifted children can be stimulated by the use of a book like The turn about, think about, look about book (Gardner). Each picture in the book is to be turned four directions and the reader is to determine what image is present. Though an answer is provided, the author of the book clearly intends for the reader to feel free to interpret the picture individually. Divergent thinking is required or encouraged in so few instances that this book is a welcome addition. The imagination can also be stimulated as we follow the adventures of The Knight of the Golden Plain (Hunter). "There was a boy once, who decided to be a knight--a strong and fearless knight. And in his dream..." we follow him on his quest to fight dragons and defeat evil. The reader can dream an individual dream of a quest worth pursuing.

Chris Van Allsburg is possibly the master of the imaginative book. Jumanji creates an eerie scene that

explores the line between reality and fantasy when a board game comes to life and compels the players to continue to the end in the face of such events as a rhinoceros stampede and a volcano erupting. In Allsburg's The Mysteries of Harris Burdick, fourteen intriguing illustrations comprise the text, each with title and first line. The rest of the page is blank and is an irresistable lure for readers to complete the story in their imagination, orally or in writing.

One of the most positive trends in children's literature today is the creation of excellent informational books on single topics that reflect the interests of children. Gifted children read more books about science, nature, history and the like than do average children (Greenlaw & McIntosh, in press). There is a wealth of appropriate books available to allow the young reader to initiate a study on a particular topic and then to delve more deeply in more sophisticated books.

Jean Fritz has written numerous books about American history that reveal humorous and little known facts about the people and events of times such as the American Revolution. Her research is impeccable as well as her writing being of the highest quality and a child who reads And Then What Happened, Paul Revere? will be motivated to read others in the series and to learn more about that time in our history. Those who are challenged to know more

about science would do well to begin with some of the books by Cole and Wexler. The combination of lucid text and exemplary photographs makes their science books like A Snake's Body outstanding. And for those who read voraciously on any topic and to discover new interests, there are wonderful books like Rodeo (Tinkelman) to whet the appetite.

SENSITIVITY

One of the hallmarks of gifted children is their heightened sensitivity to self and others (Krueger, 1978; Roedell, Jackson, & Robinson, 1980). Barbe (1967, p. 13) said that

> The characteristic most readily identifiable in gifted children, varying both in kind and degree, is sensitivity. Whether the sensitivity is to one or more particular areas of learning, sensitivity to discovering or solving problems, or sensitivity to the feelings of one's fellow man, it is so much a characteristic of giftedness that it can almost be said that the two terms are synonymous.

There is a growing body of literature that incorporates this sensitivity to self and others in a manner that is neither saccharin nor maudlin.

All children experience fear at some point in their childhood and books are a relatively safe medium through

which to face these fears and to experiment with various modes of response. We are not talking about bibliotherapy, but rather a sharing of common experiences and emotions. On the way to a Picnic (McCully), one mouse child bounces out of the bed of the truck and is left behind. As it is a large family and the family members scatter on reaching the picnic site, it is not until it is time to eat that the family realizes a child is missing. The wordless book alternates between the family and the lost child and we see her resourcefulness until she is reunited with her family.

Alfie has been invited to his first birthday party and is a bit nervous. His old piece of blanket gives him moral support until another child at the party is scared and Alfie must make a decision. He decides to put his blanket under the table and Alfie Gives a Hand (Hughes) to his friend to help her over her fear. He also decides that next time he can probably leave the blanket at home. Two cousins decide that they will make The Climb (Carrick) up the mountain near Nora's home. Brendan is younger and experiences fear when they reach a place of open and rather steep rock. Nora teases him and then helps him to the top. On the way down, Nora hides in a cave to scare Brendan, but becomes frightened when she gets stuck in the cave. The two cousins each learn something from the day and they become much better friends, as well.

To be different, to be scorned or laughed at is a frightening thing. The gifted are often different and they must develop means of coping with this. Their difference is usually in a positive direction, but they must learn to accept their differentness and, indeed, to revel in it. Ben listens to the jazz musicians practice each day and he often joins in with an imaginary trumpet. One day as he is blasting away at Ben's Trumpet (Isadora) some kids see him and mock him. Ben is disheartened and stops his play until the trumpeter from the club gives him an opportunity actually to play a real trumpet. The satisfaction on both their faces is a joy to behold.

Daniel lived in a cabin on a mountain in Tennessee. He decided to carve a duck during the long winter to be displayed at the spring fair. His brother told him he was doing it wrong, but Daniel persisted in following his vision. At the fair, Daniel realized that people were laughing at his duck and he grabbed it and ran from the hall. As he was about to throw it into the river, a hand stopped him. It was Henry Pettigrew, the best woodcarver in Tennessee, and he explained that the people were laughing because the duck gave them pleasure. Daniel's Duck (Bulla) was different, but the difference was pleasing to those at the fair.

Molly is unhappy in her third grade because her clothes and her language make her stand out. When the teacher gives

the class an assignment to make a Pilgrim, Molly's mother made a clothespin doll that resembles her, because she is a Pilgrim who came from Russia to find religious freedom. The teacher understands and some in the class decide that Molly's Pilgrim (Cohen) is the very best of all.

A child's world includes adults and the relationship between child and adult can be very positive. There are several books that explore that relationship in an uplifting way. Nelly and Bartholomew are neighbors and when Nelly is small, Bartholomew is her key to the world. They go everywhere together and are inseparable. When Bartholomew gets older he has an accident and is confined to a wheelchair. But Nelly is older, too, and she becomes his key to the world in A Special Trade (Wittman).

John goes to visit his grandparents and gets pleasure from seeing the world Through Grandpa's Eyes (MacLachlan). Grandpa is blind and he helps John learn to use his other senses to appreciate the world around him. In another book, a little girl and her grandfather share a very special love. He makes many beautiful things for her, but most of all he shares himself and expresses his love for her. The Two of Them (Aliki) go for walks and work in his store and when he retires they have even more time together. When her grandfather becomes ill the little girl cares for him and she is not ready when he dies. But, she picks the fruit

from his trees and knows that she will be there to watch them change in the seasons and to remember.

BEAUTY

A concomitant to sensitivity is the gifted child's appreciation of beauty. The corpus of children's literature is rich with books that can enhance the gifted child's growing appreciation of art. Many of the books that have already been mentioned would qualify for this section. Rather than repeat the titles, we will leave it to the judgement of the reader to select those that could be used for this purpose. In addition, several titles will be highlighted.

Some books have the quality of fine art and one would almost expect to see the paintings hanging in a museum. Where the River Begins (Locker) is a book of majestic landscape paintings that render the many moods of nature. Marcia Brown's illustrations for Shadow have a three dimensional perspective that encourages the reader to back off from the book to gain the distance that brings the work alive. This book is perfect for storytelling both in the language and in the perspective of the art.

The beauty of some books is in the perfection of the interpretation of the text in a style and medium that brings joy to the reader. Yeh-Shen (Louie) is a Cinderella story from China and Ed Young, the illustrator, who is Chinese,

spent more than two years with two trips to China to create the illustrations. His understanding of the culture is obvious in his work of classic beauty. Another Chinese tale is wonderfully depicted in a blend of black and white and color. The Seeing Stick (Yolen) tells in black and white of a blind princess. When she is given the gift of "sight," seeing the world through her fingers and her heart, the illustrations become shimmering colors. Barbara Cooney did research in Mexico to enable her to capture the naive folk art quality for Spirit Child (Bierhorst), an Aztec story of the Nativity. And, Susan Jeffers dazzles the eye as well as the heart with her jewel-like illustrations for Wild Robin.

Lest one forget that black and white can be as stunning as full color, two books will be suggested. Donna Diamond achieves an almost photographic clarity and preciseness with her illustrations for Rumpelstiltskin. The pencil drawings are superb and they provide an interesting interpretation of the story. John Steptoe has illustrated The Story of the Jumping Mouse, a Native American legend, in vibrant lines that make the animals seem to leap from the page.

These books and numerous others can form the basis for a collection that will exemplify many art styles and will bring beauty to the reader. They will also enable the young gifted reader to begin to understand and appreciate the method by which the illustrator brings meaning to the text.

HUMOR

A sense of humor that is both quick and sophisticated is to be expected from gifted children. Their facility with language makes them particularly adept at punning and other word plays. These children are not amused at books that make fun of others, as their humor is rarely exhibited at the expense of someone else. Rather, they enjoy books that play on words and present gentle humor or subtle satire that sometimes goes over the heads of their agemates (Greenlaw & McIntosh, in press).

Books that make use of absurd situations are fun to share because they can be pleasurable on several levels. One can laugh at the patently absurd tale that Grandpa tells Mary Ann and Louie when they come to him with the complaint that We Can't Sleep. He tells of a night when he was young when the same thing happened to him so among other things, he ran fifty miles uphill and fought a fire-breathing dragon, but finally ended up back in a home just like this one. Of course, Mary Ann and Louie are asleep by now. The cartoon style illustrations fully complement the text and add to the fun as they show a child Grandpa with his mustache in full flourish. Most readers enjoy the broad humor to be found in Stevenson's books about Grandpa and his tales, but the gifted reader will also appreciate the more subtle message that is carried by the illustrations. Cully Cully and the Bear (Gage) is another example of the absurd.

Cully Cully decided the floor of his home was hard and went in search of a bearskin. He nicked the nose of a bear who began to chase him around a tree and they each began to think there must be more fierce animals as they passed each other and finally begin to run together until they were exhausted. Again, the expressions in the illustrations add to the fun.

The imaginative play of young gifted children often incorporates a sense of fun. Joseph is getting dressed for the day and has only one sock. Joseph's Other Red Sock (Daly) seems to have been captured by something in his cupboard that flops and flaps and wiggles and jiggles when Joseph tries to rescue the sock. The ensuing battle leaves the room a mess, but Joseph has his sock and Mum understands such battles.

A more subtle humor is portrayed in Friends (Heine). Charlie Rooster, Johnny Mouse, and fat Percy the pig are friends and they try to do everything together. The illustrations are wonderful as they show the three riding a bicycle with Charlie steering, and Johnny and Percy each on a pedal. Most children will find the book funny because the pictures are exuberant and cheerful. The gifted will be more aware that the situations are impossible and therefore even funnier. Word play in the form of a repetitive phrase creates the dramatic tension as we wonder whether Grandpa will be able to fix Grady's bear so it is Good As New

(Douglass). Cousin K.C. has been to visit and has done severe damage to the bear and Grandpa says, "Never you mind now" as he patiently sets about correcting the damage. Grady judges his grandfather's work to be perfect and this warm and gentle story is infused with their love as well as humor.

On a more sophisticated level, The King of the Pipers (Elwell) is a satirical fairy tale of a young man who plays the bagpipes so badly that he turns listeners to stone. As everyone flees from his playing he innocently garners a kingdom, a castle, and a princess. All's well that ends well and with John's heart of gold he rescues the princess and sacrifices his pipes to keep her warm. He is then rewarded with pipes of gold that never hit a sour note. The throwaway lines will have the reader laughing aloud. A final book that also stimulates a hearty laugh is Like Jake and Me (Jukes). Alex is sure that his new stepfather is afraid of nothing and the cowboy and the child have little in common. An incident with a spider brings the two closer together and the illustrations of Jake stripping off his clothes one by one to eventually discover the spider in his hat are truly funny. The image of Jake in the alltogether being goosed by the feather in his hat is wonderful.

SUMMARY

Gifted children need a profusion of reading materials that reflect their broad interests and abilities. Children's literature can become a valued part of the reading program and the books selected can be representative of the strengths of gifted children. The books suggested here, as well as many others that can be found in sources such as Polette's Picture Books for Gifted Programs (1981), can provide a stimulus to the thinking and responding of these bright, creative children.

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